

Message Text

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SUBJECT: PLP MODERATES CONTINUE ADVANCE

REF: LONDON 15839

1. DECEMBER 12 FINANCIAL TIMES REPORTS THE PARLIAMENTARY LABOR PARTY (PLP) MODERATES ROUTED LEFT-WING CANDIDATES, MOSTLY MEMBERS OF TRIBUNE GROUP, IN ELECTIONS FOR LEADERSHIP OF BACKBENCH TRADE UNION GROUP. MODERATE TOM URWIN, WHO IS SPONSORED BY BUILDING TRADES WORKERS UNION (BTWU), WAS REELECTED CHAIRMAN UNOPPOSED. MODERATES BERNARD CONLON (AUEW) AND ROY HUGHES (TGWU) WERE ELECTED VICE CHAIRMEN, AND THE RIGHT-WING SWEPT ALL OTHER POSITIONS ON THE BOARD. FOLLOWING MODERATES, WITH UNION AFFILIATION, WERE ELECTED: RAY FLETCHER (TGWU); RON LEWIS (NUR); JAMES JOHNSON (GMWU); GEORGE GRANT (NUM); BEN FORD (AUEW) AND JOHN GOLDING (POEU). LEFT-WINGERS ROY CARTER (TGWU); NEIL KINNOCK (TGWU); SID BIDWELL (TGWU); JOHN PRESCOTT (NUW) AND ROGER STOTT (POEU) FINISHED OUT OF THE MONEY.

2. EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH A RIGHT-WING ACTION ORGANIZATION

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IN THE PLP TO COUNTERBALANCE THE TRIBUNE GROUP (REFTEL)

ARE CONTINUING. THIS ORGANIZATION, HEADED BY MODERATE, PRO-MARKETEER DICKSON MABON WHO TOOK OVER FROM CLEDWYN HUGHES WHEN HUGHES WAS ELECTED CHAIRMAN OF PLP, IS REPORTEDLY PREPARING FOR FORMAL MEETING OF SYMPATHETIC MPS (BY INVITATION ONLY) WHICH WILL DECIDE WHETHER TO FORMALIZE THE GROUP. IF FORMALIZED, THIS GROUP'S NAME WILL PROBABLY INCORPORATE SOME REFERENCE TO THE PARTY MANIFESTO, AS THE MODERATES WISH TO IDENTIFY WITH THAT DOCUMENT, IN CONTRAST TO THE MORE EXTREME POSITIONS ADVOCATED BY THE TRIBUNE GROUP. REPORTEDLY OVER 100 LABOR MPS HAVE INDICATED AN INTEREST IN THE NEW GROUP, THOUGH GOVERNMENT MINISTERS HAVE BEEN EXCLUDED IN ORDER TO AVOID THE APPEARANCE THAT IT IS A GOVERNMENT STALKING HORSE.

3. COMMENT - THESE DEVELOPMENTS ARE FURTHER INDICATIONS, IF SUCH ARE NEEDED, OF THE RIGHT-WING'S NEWLY-FOUND ASSERTIVENESS. WHILE FORMATION OF A MODERATE "MANIFESTO" GROUP MAY TEND TO POLARIZE EXISTING DIVISIONS WITHIN THE PLP, AND THUS IMPLIES SOME THREAT TO PLP UNITY, IT APPEARS UNLIKELY THAT, IF FORMALIZED, IT WOULD BE SERIOUSLY DIVISIVE. ON THE POSITIVE SIDE, SUCH A GROUPING WOULD IMPROVE COORDINATION AMONG PLP MODERATES AND FACILITATE THEIR EFFORTS TO COMBAT THE LEFT. PRIME MINISTER WILSON HAS NOT PROVIDED ANY CLUES AS TO HIS VIEWS OF THE MODERATES' RECENT EFFORTS TO MOBILIZE THEIR FORCES, BUT THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT HE HAS DISCOURAGED THEM. INDEED, HOME SECRETARY ROY JENKINS AND OTHER CABINET MINISTERS ARE REPORTEDLY ENCOURAGING THE MODERATES.

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